

A Good Place to Talk: Discourse and Topos in Achilles Tatius and Philostratus

RICHARD P. MARTIN
Stanford University

We might think more germane to architects, urban planners, restaurateurs and telephone companies the question: what makes a place good for talk? Yet the evidence of ancient Greek novels suggests that tellers of those tales were equally concerned with this issue and its implications. In this paper I would like to explore the place taken up in one such ancient tale, the story of Leukippê and Kleitophôn attributed to Achilles Tatius. I shall propose that his attention to place is, in fact, a way of being attentive to the qualities of his own artistic creation. In other words, for Achilles Tatius, *topos* is more than just a topos. Furthermore, I shall argue that the rhetoric of place as it relates to narrative makes explicit a deeply felt link in Greek literature and culture between the ground on which one walks and the people of whom, as well as with whom, one speaks. This latter point will take us on short treks into other territory—Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, Plato's *Phaedrus*, and a possible contemporary of Achilles Tatius, the Philostratus who authored the *Heroikos*. If in the end we come to think of this Greek novel as being more like aboriginal Australian narratives and less like the "novel" so-called, I will have achieved part of my purpose.¹

On this textual journey there are seven stops, best viewed as a series of transformations. As in the Ovidian model (itself perhaps a forerunner of the ancient novel), so with my chosen topos, people become trees, trees people,

¹ In a wonderful convergence of theme and scene, the organizers of the May 2001 Rhythmo conference on space in the novel provided us with exactly the right place to talk, at the right time of year, with the best of company. I wish to take this opportunity to thank all our hosts at the University of Crete, and in particular Michael Paschalis and Stavros Frangoulidis, for their generous hospitality, gracious conversation, and good counsel.

and love is enacted not only *in* but *as* a landscape. The events transpire, one should note, not only as surface topographical occurrences, but also in conjunction with what lies beneath the earth. There are roots to the approach, regarding which it will be useful to make one theoretical point before moving to the first text. Drawing on the Russian Formalist distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, or “story” and “discourse,” I shall organize my comments in terms of “speaker space” and “plot space,” respectively.² This elementary contrast is meant to account for two sorts of description in the texts that follow: on the one hand, the fairly common detailing of landscape features through which a novel’s characters move—“plot space” by my term—and on the other, the much less common, but crucially foregrounded description by a *narrator* of the place in which his own discourse is generated. The distinction is perhaps obvious; what is perhaps less predictable, and what poses more interesting questions, is the way in which the two “spaces”—narrator’s and characters’—intersect and merge. It is precisely through such mergers that Achilles Tatius works his art.

We should begin at the beginning of the novel. The narrator of Leukippê and Kleitophôn tells us right away that he once escaped shipwreck and went to the temple of Astarte in the Phoenician city of Sidon to give thanks. There he saw a painting of a famous mythic scene. Actually, he describes the scene, but never explicitly says that it *is* a myth. Thus the effect is, from the start, one of blending everyday life in the narrator’s present with an unspecific past—perhaps a point not very far in the past. The style of the painting is virtuosic, a combination of landscape and seascape, with realistic touches, such as the pick-holding gardener placed in the scene (1.1.3):³

Εὐρώπης ἡ γραφή· Φοινίκων ἡ θάλασσα· Σιδῶνος ἡ γῆ. Ἐν τῇ γῆ λειμῶν καὶ χορὸς παρθένων. ἐν τῇ θαλάττῃ ταῦρος ἐνήχεται, καὶ τοῖς νότοις καλὴ παρθένος ἐπεκάθητο, ἐπὶ Κρήτην τῷ ταύρῳ πλεύουσα. ἐκόμα πολλοῖς ἄνθεσιν ὁ λειμῶν· δένδρων αὐτοῖς ἀνεμέμικτο φάλαγξ καὶ φυτῶν· συνεχὴ τὰ δένδρα· συνηρεφῆ τὰ πέταλα· συνήπτον οἱ πτόρθοι τὰ φύλλα, καὶ ἐγένετο τοῖς ἄνθεσιν ὄροφος ἢ τῶν φύλλων συμπλοκή. ἔγραψεν ὁ τεχνίτης ὑπὸ τὰ πέταλα καὶ τὴν σκιάν, καὶ ὁ ἥλιος ἡρέμα τοῦ λειμῶνος κάτω σποράδην διέρρει, ὅσον τὸ συνηρεφὲς τῆς τῶν φύλλων κόμης ἀνέωξεν ὁ γραφεύς. ὅλον ἐτείχιζε τὸν λειμῶνα περιβολή· εἶσω δὲ

² On the distinction and its history, see Chatman (1978) 19–22 and Erlich (1981) 239–50.

³ Text and translation from Loeb edition by Gaselee revised by Warmington (1969)

τοῦ τῶν ὀρόφων στεφανώματος ὁ λειμῶν ἐκάθητο. αἱ δὲ πρασιαὶ τῶν ἀνθέων ὑπὸ τὰ πέταλα τῶν φυτῶν στοιχηδὸν ἐπεφύκεσαν, νάρκισσος καὶ ῥόδα καὶ μύρριναί. ὕδωρ δὲ κατὰ μέσον ἔρρει τοῦ λειμῶνος τῆς γραφῆς, τὸ μὲν ἀναβλύζον κάτωθεν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, τὸ δὲ τοῖς ἀνθεσι καὶ τοῖς φυτοῖς περιχεόμενον. ὀχετηγός τις ἐγγράπτο δίκηλλαν κατέχων καὶ περὶ μίαν ἀμάραν κεκυφώς καὶ ἀνοίγων τὴν ὁδὸν τῷ ρεύματι.

“The painting was of Europa; the sea depicted was the Phoenician Ocean; the land, Sidon. On the land part was a meadow and a troop of girls; in the sea a bull was swimming, and on his back sat a beautiful maiden, borne by the bull towards Crete. The meadow was thick with all kinds of flowers, and among them was planted a thicket of trees and shrubs, the trees growing so close that their foliage touched; and the branches, intertwining their leaves, thus made a kind of continuous roof over the flowers beneath. The artist had also represented the shadows thrown by the leaves, and the sun was gently breaking through, here and there, on to the meadow, where the painter had represented openings in the thick roof of foliage. The meadow was surrounded on all sides by an enclosure, and lay wholly within the embowering roof; beneath the shrubs grass-beds of flowers grew orderly—narcissus, roses, and bays; in the middle of the meadow in the picture flowed a rivulet of water bubbling up on one side from the ground, and on the other watering the flowers and shrubs; and a gardener had been painted holding a pick, stooping over a single channel and leading a path for the water.”

Three aspects of this ekphrasis deserve our attention—its syntax, its metaphorical language, and its imagery. All three combine to make the description something like a programmatic presentation of the novelist’s own craft.⁴

First, syntax. Readers of the great Los Angeles mystery writer Raymond Chandler may hear echoes of his hard-bitten laconic style in the way that our passage begins. The Loeb translator was clearly too highbrow to reproduce such effects literally. A closer version, capturing the word-order and style, would run something like this: “the painting—it’s Europa. The sea—Phoenician. Territory—Sidon. In it, a meadow. A maiden chorus.”⁵ The

⁴ On ekphrasis see especially Bartsch (1989). I have not been able to consult Harlan (1965).

⁵ On Achilles Tatius’ style as baroque and Asianic, see Bowie (1999) 51.

author starts out employing a strikingly paratactic syntax with no connective particles of the type one expects in Attic prose, and even without overt verbs or verb phrases. The effect is painterly, as if striving for pure static depiction rather than for a dynamic forward-moving narrative. Alongside this pointilist technique runs another, the Hemingwayesque. Notice the incantatory repetition of essential words in sequence: *thalassa, gê, gê, leimôn, parthenôn, thalassa, parthenos, leimôn, dendrôn, dendra*.⁶ The insistence on a few key nouns once again makes us perceive a freezing of the narrative, producing a static, panel-painting effect, rather than a verb-driven storyline.

Now when he turns to describe the meadow, the same repetition of key elements (*συνεχῆ* “joining together,” *συνηρεφῆ* “roofing together,” *συνῆπτον*, “twined together,” *συμπλοκή* “weaving- together”) becomes a verbal icon for the dense interweave of foliage shading the place. In sum, Achilles Tatius strives to make text mimic topos. The second aspect, metaphorical language, is what enables us to accept this unusual blending of world with language. For the author consistently applies “culture” words to the natural scene he paints.⁷ Note such phrases as *dendrôn phalanx*, “a phalanx (culture word) of trees” (nature). Or, to take another example, *tois anthesin orophos*, “a roof (culture) for flowers” (nature). In fact, the entire image of a meadow enclosed as if in the room of a house is the perfect expression for nature enclosed in a painting. But also—more to the point—it is the most apt image for a living world enclosed in the bounds of text, which is exactly the novelist’s accomplishment.

Finally, the imagery of the passage includes a detail that we might see as equivalent to the writer writing himself into the text—the gardener. If the novelist, as weaver of words, is like the one who arranged this cultured, cultivated bower of intersecting leaves and trees, then the Brueghel touch of the little man with a pick directing the stream of water within the meadow is nothing other than a generic self-portrait. As we shall see shortly, the gardener figure in a cognate novelistic work even more explicitly stands for the cultivator of stories. By the way, in connection with this affiliation of the one who arranges landscapes with the one who lines up words, it is worth pointing to the word *stoikhedôn* in section five of the passage above. Literally, it describes the orderly disposition of grassy flower plots. But of course the

⁶ Compare the opening of e.g. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

⁷ On the relation of metaphor to the theme of metamorphosis within “baroque” poetics, see Mignogna (1995) 24–29.

same adverb, “in lines,” can describe the arrangement of Greek words on stone or page. Once again, the novelist takes the guise of landscape artist.

So much for what we can call the painted landscape. If the opening passage signals to us that we are dealing with a highly self-conscious narrator, the next passage to be considered (1.2.1) reinforces the links between tale and topography. For convenience, I shall call the narrator, who is apparently the author, narrator #1. We do not in fact know whether this is supposed to be Achilles Tatius. As Brian Reardon has pointed out, much of the artistry of this novel lies in the play of various “ego-narrators” and what they know.⁸ As an “ego-narrator,” teller #1 reveals only a little about himself. We learn especially from this passage that he is “a lover” himself, and thus paid particular attention to the painted love story of Europa, with its symbolic inclusion of Eros. Just after hearing this from the narrator, we get another blending of art into life. A young man standing near claims to be a victim of Eros, just like Zeus in the painting. Observe narrator #1 and his reaction at this juncture. First, he wants to obtain pleasure from the young man’s many real-life stories, “even if they are like fiction”(ει και μυθοις εοικε). This coy reference to fiction within a work of fiction obviously is meant to emphasize the “reality” of the fiction, but of course simultaneously reminds us that it is a fictional reality into which we are being drawn.⁹ After this paradoxical statement of the narrator’s desire, he proceeds to make an interesting move, taking the young man by the hand and leading him to a grove (*alsos*), which, it emerges, is the perfect place for talk:

καὶ ταῦτα δὴ λέγων δεξιούμαι τε αὐτὸν καὶ ἐπὶ τινος ἄλσους ἄγω γείτονος, ἔνθα πλάτανοι μὲν ἐπεφύκεσαν πολλαὶ καὶ πυκναί, παρέρρει δὲ ὕδωρ ψυχρόν τε καὶ διαυγές, οἷον ἀπὸ χιόνος ἄρτι λυθείσης ἔρχεται. καθίσας οὖν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τινος θώκου χαμαιζήλου καὶ αὐτὸς παρακαθισάμενος, “Ὡρα σοι,” ἔφην, “τῆς τῶν λόγων ἀκροάσεως· πάντως δὲ ὁ τόπος ἡδὺς καὶ μύθων ἄξιος ἐρωτικῶν.”

“And while I was speaking I took him by the hand and led him to a grove at no great distance, where many thick plane-tress were growing, and a stream of water flowing through, cool and translucent, as if it came from freshly-melted snow. There I bade him sit down on a low bench, and I

⁸ Reardon (1999).

⁹ On the paradoxical relation of reality and appearance in this book, see Mignogna (1995).

sat by him, and said: “Now is the time to hear your tale; and the surroundings are pleasant and altogether suitable for listening to a love-story.”

This is a place for erotic fiction. But why is this exact spot so suitable? First, because both it and love (we presume) are *hêdus*, “pleasant.” This may make us think the spot is merely an example of the *locus amoenus* motif in its erotic context, a *topos* that goes all the way back to Homer and Hesiod. In the immediate context, however, it appears that a good deal more is happening. Significantly, this is an *alsos*, and not a *leimôn*. The latter, the flower-filled meadow, often associated with the abduction of marriageable girls, is a well-known erotic landscape.¹⁰ But the former, a shady grove with plane trees, snow-cold water and a bench, signals a different *topos*, literally and in literary genealogy. If anything, it recalls the mysterious divine grove of the *Oedipus at Colonus* (668–719), a text also featuring a wandering victim of a god who tells his story to a fascinated audience. In addition, one cannot help but be reminded of the love discourse recited at a beautiful spot in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, a passage to be discussed at the end of this paper. At any rate, it is this implicit contrast in narrative places that bears the semantic weight. “Speaker space” is a much cooler, less erotically charged place, a location where Eros is put into the properly distanced perspective. Perhaps it is not accidental that the stream running through this space is described as “translucent” (*diaugês*), a term reminiscent of simple prose writing with its stylistic ideal of calm *saphêneia*.

The third landscape we encounter in Leukippê and Kleitophôn comes at 1.15.1–7 and is described, unlike the opening pair of (painted) meadow and (real) grove, in the words of narrator #2, Kleitophôn, the hero of the tale. We can call this the lovers’ landscape. By this early point in Kleitophôn’s story, he has already fallen in love at first sight with Leukippê and is eager to see her at every opportunity. After the funeral of his friend’s *erômenos*, killed in a riding accident, Kleitophôn rushes to his own beloved. They meet in a landscape that is elaborately detailed. Once again, the scenery on its own might be taken as conventional, another *locus amoenus*. But taken as the third landscape in a closely related sequence, it reveals more intriguing de-

¹⁰ Cf. *H. Dem.* 6–16. to Demeter; the Cologne epode of Archilochus (196a West) 14–16 makes the ravished girl a virtual landscape.

tails, features that say something by way of contrast with the earlier depictions we have seen (1.15.1–7):

ὁ δὲ παράδεισος ἄλσος ἦν, μέγα τι χρῆμα πρὸς ὀφθαλμῶν ἡδονήν· καὶ περὶ τὸ ἄλσος τειχίον ἦν αὐτάρκες εἰς ὕψος καὶ ἐκάστη πλευρὰ τειχίου (τέσσαρες δὲ ἦσαν πλευραὶ) κατάστεγος ὑπὸ χορῶ κίωνων· ὑπὸ δὲ τοῖς κίοσιν ἔνδον ἦν ἡ τῶν δένδρων πανήγυρις. ἔθαλλον οἱ κλάδοι, συνέπιπτον ἀλλήλοις ἄλλος ἐπ' ἄλλον· αἱ γείτονες τῶν πετάλων περιπλοκαί, τῶν φύλλων περιβολαί, τῶν καρπῶν συμπλοκαί. τοιαύτη τις ἦν ὁμιλία τῶν φυτῶν. ἐνίοις δὲ τῶν δένδρων τῶν ἀδροτέρων κιττὸς καὶ σμίλαξ παρεπεφύκει· ἡ μὲν ἐξηρημένη πλατάνου καὶ περιπυκάζουσα ῥαδινητῇ τῇ κόμῃ· ὁ δὲ κιττὸς περὶ πεύκην ἐλιχθεὶς ὤκειοῦτο τὸ δένδρον ταῖς περιπλοκαῖς, καὶ ἐγίνετο τῷ κιττῷ ὄχημα τὸ φυτόν, στέφανος δὲ ὁ κιττὸς τοῦ φυτοῦ. ἄμπελοι δὲ ἐκατέρωθεν τοῦ δένδρου, καλάμοις ἐποχούμεναι, τοῖς φύλλοις ἔθαλλον, καὶ ὁ καρπὸς ὠραίαν εἶχε τὴν ἄνθη καὶ διὰ τῆς ὀπῆς τῶν καλάμων ἐξεκρέματο καὶ ἦν βόστρυχος τοῦ φυτοῦ· τῶν δὲ φύλλων ἄνωθεν αἰωρουμένων, ὑφ' ἡλίου πρὸς ἄνεμον συμιγεῖ ὠχρὰν ἐμάρμαιρην ἢ γῆ τὴν σκιάν. τὰ δὲ ἄνθη ποικίλην ἔχοντα τὴν χροιάν, ἐν μέρει συνεξέφαινε τὸ κάλλος, καὶ ἦν τοῦτο τῆς γῆς πορφύρα καὶ νάρκισσος καὶ ῥόδον. μία μὲν τῷ ῥόδῳ καὶ τῷ ναρκίσσῳ ἢ κάλυξ, ὅσον εἰς περιγραφὴν· καὶ ἦν φιάλη τοῦ φυτοῦ. ἡ χροιά δὲ τῶν περὶ τὴν κάλυκα φύλλων ἐσχισμένων, τῷ ῥόδῳ μὲν αἵματος τὸ ἄνω καὶ γάλακτος, τὸ κάτω τοῦ φύλλου, καὶ ὁ νάρκισσος ἦν τὸ πᾶν ὅμοιον τῷ κάτω τοῦ ῥόδου. τῷ ἴῳ κάλυξ μὲν οὐδαμοῦ, χροιά δὲ οἶαν ἢ τῆς θαλάσσης ἀστράπτει γαλήνη. ἐν μέσοις δὲ τοῖς ἄνθεσι πηγὴ ἀνέβλυζε καὶ περιεγέγραπτο τετράγωνος χαράδρα χειροποίητος τῷ ῥεύματι. τὸ δὲ ὕδωρ τῶν ἀνθέων ἦν κατόπτρον, ὡς δοκεῖν τὸ ἄλσος εἶναι διπλοῦν, τὸ μὲν τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ δὲ τῆς σκιᾶς.

“This garden was a meadow, a very object of beauty to the eyes; round it ran a wall of sufficient height and each of the four sides of the wall formed a portico standing on pillars, within which was a close plantation of trees. Their branches, which were in full foliage, intertwined with one another; their neighboring flowers mingled with each other, their leaves overlapped, their fruits joined. Such was the way in which the trees grew together; to some of the larger of them were ivy and smilax attached, the smilax hanging from planes and filling all the interstices between the

boughs with its soft foliage, the ivy twisting up the pines and embracing the trunks, so that the tree formed support for the ivy, and the ivy a garland for the tree. On either side of each tree grew vines, creeping upon reed supports, with luxuriant foliage; these, now in full fruitage, hung from the joints of the reeds, and formed as it were the ringlets of the tree. The leaves higher up were in gentle motion, and the rays of the sun penetrating them as the wind moved them gave the effect of a pale, mottled shadow on the ground. Flowers too of many hues displayed each their own beauty, and this formed the earth's gay color—the narcissus and the rose. Now the calyx of the narcissus and the rose was alike so far as shape goes—the cup in fact of the plants. As for the color of the much-divided petals round the calyx, the rose was like blood above and milk below, whereas the narcissus was wholly of the color of the lower part of the rose; there were violets, too, whose cup-shaped blossoms you could not distinguish, but their color was as that of a shining calm at sea. In the midst of all these flowers bubbled up a spring, the waters of which were confined in a square artificial basin; the water served as a mirror for the flowers, giving the impression of a double grove, one real and the other a reflection.

In several ways this is a landscape we have viewed already. Like the meadow of the painting (1.1.3–6), it is a carefully arranged space, a *paradeisos* made to please the eyes. The space is bounded and enclosed by a wall, each side of which is like a portico. Again, like the painted meadow, intertwining branches and leaves form a house-like roof for the space below. As if to key us into the resemblance, the portico's construction is described in a quite unusual image, easily lost in translation: *katastegos hupo khorôi kionôn*, “roofed with the support of a chorus of pillars.” The primary reference seems to operate by means of a poetic elision of pillars with human forms. Perhaps we are meant to have in mind something like the Caryatid Porch of the Erechtheum on the Athenian acropolis, with its chorus of lightly stepping women in the role of supporting columns. In its immediate local context, however, surely the image of a chorus in a garden space recalls the *choros parthenôn* that accompanies Europa in the painted image (1.1.3).

And yet this is *not* quite a garden. Unlike the erotic *leimôn* of the painted landscape, this scene as described by Kleitophôn both recalls the entwining trees of the opening landscape passage and also is explicitly called an *alsos*

(1.15.1), like the speaker's space of the second landscape (1.2.1–3). A further link with the cool grove where the story is told is the detail that this paradisaical grove is for pleasure (*mega ti khrêma pros ophthalmôn hêdonên*: 1.15.1). How can one explain this blended landscape, a flowery but forested combination of cool and humid environs? If we follow the transformative logic of the novel, it is not unexpected. The blending captures on an imagistic level exactly what co-occurs on the narratological level: for at this point, a *character*, Kleitophôn, has achieved his full voice as *narrator* #2. So speaker space (the grove of narrator #1) blends into plot space (the trysting spot described and used by narrator #2 as also that of Europa's abduction).

But the transformative logic that we have been tracing goes even further. In this scene of the lovers' landscape, we are given unmistakable hints of a *loving* landscape. Closeness and intimacy, human contact and touch, are all implied in the diction that flourishes so lushly here. The trees form a *panêguris* (1.15.2). Branches fall onto one another like bodies (1.15.2). The homoioteleuton of *periplokai*, *peribolai*, and *sumplokai* makes a verbal icon of wrappings, overlappings, entrappings (1.15.2). Trees and vines embrace (1.15.3). Plants have a "converse" with one another (*homilia*:1.15.3).

Moreover, the plant life takes on the appearance of humans. The vines, for example, are "ringlets" (*bostrukhos*:1.15.4) for the trees, as if trees are women. The metaphor latent in the Greek habit of calling foliage "hair" (*komê*) is extended by such tropes. The ensuing description of flower shapes and colors has its own erotic overtones, nor can we forget that one of these—the narcissus—is already a story embedded in the earth, a tale of self-reflexive love.¹¹ The image with which the narrator sums up this depiction brings us back to the dilemma of nature's relation to art, reality's ties to imitation, that we have already seen at play in the shady grove of 1.2.1–3. The natural spring (*pêgê*) confined in its tetragonal, artificial basin (itself like writing, inasmuch as it has been "lined off," *periegegrapto*) provides a watery mirror "giving the impression of a double grove, one real and the other a reflection." Were it not for the terms already set by narrator #1 in his desire to hear reality "even if it is like fiction," we might treat this contrived image

¹¹ See Pellizer (1988) for a sophisticated interpretation of the tale's various reflexivities at the level of myth.

as merely a baroque manner of extending the description.¹² As it is, the image supplements and continues the crucial thematizing of novelistic art.

This theme is also a concern in the next landscape to meet our eyes, 1.17.3–5:

περὶ δὲ τῶν φυτῶν λέγουσι παῖδες σοφῶν· καὶ μῦθον ἔλεγον ἂν τὸν λόγον εἶναι, εἰ μὴ καὶ παῖδες ἔλεγον γεωργῶν. ὁ δὲ λόγος· ἄλλο μὲν ἄλλου φυτὸν ἐρᾶν, τῷ δὲ φοίνικι τὸν ἔρωτα μᾶλλον ἐνοχλεῖν· λέγουσι δὲ τὸν μὲν ἄρρενα τῶν φοινίκων, τὸν δὲ θήλυον. ὁ ἄρρην οὖν τοῦ θήλεος ἐρᾶ· κἂν ὁ θήλυς ἀπωκισμένος ἢ τῇ τῆς φυτείας στάσει, ὁ ἐραστής αὐαίνεται. συνήσιν οὖν ὁ γεωργὸς τὴν λύπην τοῦ φυτοῦ, καὶ εἰς τὴν τοῦ χωρίου περιωπὴν ἀνελθὼν, ἐφορᾶ ποῖ νένευκε· κλίνεται γὰρ εἰς τὸ ἐρώμενον· καὶ μαθὼν, θεραπεύει τοῦ φυτοῦ τὴν νόσον. πτόρθον γὰρ τοῦ θήλεος φοίνικος λαβὼν, εἰς τὴν τοῦ ἄρρενος καρδίαν ἐντίθησι, καὶ ἀνέψυξε μὲν τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ φυτοῦ, τὸ δὲ σῶμα ἀποθνήσκον πάλιν ἀνεζωπύρησε καὶ ἐξανέστη, χαῖρον ἐπὶ τῇ τῆς ἐρωμένης συμπλοκῇ. καὶ τοῦτό ἐστι γάμος φυτῶν.

“As for plants, the children of wisdom have a tale to tell, one that I should deem a fable were it not that it was borne out by countrymen; and this it is. Plants, they say, fall in love with one another, and the palm is particularly susceptible to the passion: there are both male and female palms; the male falls in love with the female; and if the female be planted at any considerable distance, the loving male begins to wither away. The gardener realizes what is the cause of the tree’s grief, goes to some slight eminence in the ground, and observes in which direction it is drooping (for it always inclines towards the object of its passion); and when he has discovered this, he is soon able to heal its disease: for he takes a shoot of the female palm and grafts it into the very heart of the male. This refreshes the tree’s spirit, and the trunk, which seemed on the point of death, revives and gains new vigor in joy at the embrace of the beloved: it is a kind of vegetable marriage.”

Here the second narrator, Cleitophon, recalls a time in the past when he himself was acting consciously as a narrator: we might call him narrator #2b. As

¹² Mignogna (1995) sees it as part of the author’s baroque interest in mirrors, doubling, and metamorphosis.

the artful tale-teller, speaking so as to seduce Leukippê, he uses the sophistic topos of truth vs. fiction (one we have already heard—but she has not). “The children of wisdom” have a story that we might call a *mythos* (so he begins) were it not that the “children of farmers” call it a *logos*, or true account. The remarkable *logos*, that plants fall in love with one another (*allo men allou phuton eran*) gives Kleitophôn his opening to spin out a suggestive discourse decorously clothed in agriculturist parlance. His description of the erotics of the garden—the pining of the palms, the happy *gamos phutôn*—is, in one way, another meditation on man’s role within nature, or, more specifically, on how nature requires the work of humans (in the form of gardeners) in order to achieve fulfillment. The gardener is doctor and go-between, a dendro-pathologist. In the florid rhetoric of Kleitophôn’s hot-house prose, the gardener is also a miracle worker of sorts, gifted at giving new life to a withering tree: *anepsuxe tèn psukhên tou phutou* (1.17.5). The consequent revival is like a resurrection, as the dying body once again stands up (*exanestê*, 1.17.5). If we apply this new praise of gardeners to the association pointed out previously, of novelist as gardener, we begin to approach a view that Philostratos will finally make completely explicit. But more on that shortly.

Meanwhile, we can note that the spatial transformations have begun to form a chain, in which earlier scenes make best sense only in light of their later metamorphoses. Thus, the lovers’ landscape of the third passage (1.15.1–7) can now be seen to foreshadow the dendroerotics of the fourth, the landscape as lover (1.17.3–5). Or, we could say that narrator #2b (Kleitophôn as he was when composing his seductive speech) is embedded within narrator #2 (Kleitophôn as he tells the tale and embroiders the landscape for his latest hearer, narrator #1). In the same vein, the seductive speech will be seen to foreshadow 1.19.1–2, a short while later. For here we see the effects of Kleitophôn’s botanical blandishments. Leukippê, who has been listening to his fluent words, is pleased as we might expect given such a pleasurable landscape. But in her pleasure, the beloved *becomes* a landscape:¹³

Ταῦτα λέγων ἔβλεπον ἅμα τὴν κόρη, πῶς ἔχει πρὸς τὴν ἀκρόασιν τὴν ἔρωτικὴν· ἡ δὲ ὑπεσήμαινεν οὐκ ἀηδῶς ἀκούειν. τὸ δὲ κάλλος ἀστράπτων τοῦ ταῦ ἦττον ἐδόκει μοι τοῦ Λευκίπτης εἶναι προσώπου. τὸ γὰρ τοῦ σώματος κάλλος αὐτῆς πρὸς τὰ τοῦ λειμῶνος ἤριζεν ἄνθη· ναρκίσσου μὲν τὸ πρόσωπον ἔστιλβε χροιάν, ῥόδον δὲ ἀνέτελλεν ἐκ τῆς

¹³ On the further purposes and techniques of this passage, see Morales (1995) 43–45.

παρειᾶς, ἴον δὲ ἢ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἐμάρμαιρεν ἀγῆ, αἱ δὲ κόμαι
 βoστρυχούμεναι μᾶλλον εἰλίττοντο κιττοῦ· τοιοῦτος ἦν Λευκίππης ἐπὶ
 τῶν προσώπων ὁ λειμών.

“While recounting all these stories, I kept at the same time glancing at the maiden, to see how she felt while hearing all this talk of love; and there were some indications that she was not listening without pleasure. The gleaming beauty of the peacock seemed to me nothing in comparison with Leukippê’s lovely face; indeed, her beauty was rival of the flowers of the meadow. Her skin was bright with the hue of the narcissus. Roses sprang from her cheeks, the dark gleam of her eyes shone like the violet, the ringlets of her hair curled more tightly than the ivy—Leukippê’s whole appearance was that of a flowery meadow.”

In rapid succession she takes on the character of several flowers familiar to lovers (or forms of former lovers—like Narcissus). Moreover, the comparison of her ringlets to ivy is an obvious reminder of the earlier trysting spot, where the reverse is used to describe ivy as ringlets for trees (1.15.4).¹⁴ In the teller’s cultivated version, the loved one turns into the place *par excellence* for love, the *leimôn*, a flower-filled meadow. The narrative pleasure produced by the *rhetor*-lover causes the land/lady/listener to burst into flower. Teller and gardener are, once again, related in their trades, the arts of teasing out fulfillment.

I will not pause here to pursue the deeper associations of Leukippê-as-*leimôn*. We might think of the earlier mythopoeic tradition, in which the rape of the Leukippidae by the Diokouroi figured; it may be that the very name conjures up images of this famous abduction and its landscape, a story apparently narrated in Alcman’s first *Partheneion*. Instead, it is time to compare the progression we have been tracing within Book One of Achilles Tatius with three other relevant passages, in order to bring out as sharply as possible the differences between seemingly similar scenes, and the similarity, at a deeper level, between what might at first strike one as disparate descriptions.

First, one should take into consideration the famous proem of Longus’ pastoral romance *Daphnis and Chloe*:

¹⁴ Mignogna (1995) 31.

Ἐν Λέσβῳ θηρῶν ἐν ἄλσει Νυμφῶν θέαμα εἶδον κάλλιστον ὧν εἶδον, εἰκόνος γραφήν, ἱστορίαν ἔρωτος. Καλὸν μὲν καὶ τὸ ἄλσος, πολύδενδρον, ἀνθηρόν, κατάρρυτον· μία πηγὴ πάντα ἔτρεφε, καὶ τὰ ἄνθη καὶ τὰ δένδρα· ἀλλ' ἡ γραφὴ τερπνοτέρα, καὶ τέχνην ἔχουσα περιττὴν καὶ τύχην ἐρωτικὴν·

Once, hunting in Lesbos, I saw in a grove of Nymphs the finest sight of any I had seen, a painted image, a story of love. Fine was the grove, with many trees, flowery, irrigated. One spring was nourishing everything, flowers and trees. But the painting was more pleasurable, with its surpassing artistry and erotic Fortune.¹⁵

Froma Zeitlin has written extensively about this passage, and I forbear to repeat the delicate interconnections that she has explicated between mimesis on the authorial level and character-imitations of nature in that novel.¹⁶ What I do wish to focus on is the difference between this rococo proem and the art of spatial description as practiced by Achilles Tatius. To begin with, we must notice the generic landscape of Longus' ekphrasis; it is over in a toss-away sentence, in which we learn that the grove has trees, flowers, and water. This superficiality makes sense inasmuch as Longus' purpose is altogether different. In his version of the curtain-raising ekphrasis, the narrator is inspired to compose a novel that will both explain and rival a painted narrative, itself already "more pleasing and artful" (1.1) than the grove in which it is discovered. In Achilles Tatius, on the other hand, it is the landscape itself that subtly, through its various changes in the first book, tells a concomitant story of love. Whereas in Longus it is the painting that gives pleasure (as does the narrative Longus zealously spins out of it), in Achilles Tatius pleasure arises from the actual landscape, the stories that grow from it and, as we have seen, are rooted in it. Finally the sense we have of a merging between the realms of narrative and life is expressed in Achilles Tatius by the device of having Kleitophôn, a second narrator, be the exegete of the Europa painting. He is a reliable explicator since he himself is a living example of the power of Eros. Longus, on the other hand, merely finds a nondescript guide somewhere around the place, one whose only role is to enable the author to decode the painting before him. Exegesis does *not* become the tale itself, as

¹⁵ Translation mine.

¹⁶ Zeitlin (1994).

told by someone who has been a participant in the story. The consequent two-dimensional feeling to Longus' proem is perhaps encapsulated in the collapse there of what in Achilles Tatius comprised three distinct landscapes. We had the space of love, the *leimôn*, with its chorus of young women. Apart from that, we saw the *alsos* as the space for narration—the spot, as I argued, for a cooler and more rational narrative perspective, distanced from the heat of the erotic meadow. In Longus, however, we find an *alsos* of the Nymphs: in other words, a blend of the place of telling and dedication with the (quite different) space of erotic activity, whether of the nymphs who typically consort with Pan or of the abduction of young maidens. All of this is to say that, wherever Longus' artistry and interests might lie, they are not invested in the manipulation and transformation of depicted spaces.

So, then, where does one find a parallel to Achilles Tatius' fascination with speech and its locales? Another narrator of the Second Sophistic, an author not usually considered a novelist, provides the closest connection. It is true that in Longus we find, in Book 2, a gardener who is also a poet, Philetas. But in the *Heroikos* of Philostratus, we go one step beyond and discover a gardener who is a kind of mystic, a dresser of vines who becomes a medium for the greatest narratives of the past. Like the tale by Achilles Tatius, the opening of the *Heroikos* involves a Phoenician. He is a traveler who has come to the Chersonese and is walking in the hills, looking for weather signs. Like the first narrator in the story of Leukippê and Kleitophôn, he encounters a man with strange experiences to relate. But the adventures of this narrator, the vinedresser, are linked to the very ground he cultivates. The ancient hero Protesilaos, says the vinedresser, though long dead, comes to visit him in this spot. "Lucky you," says the Phoenician, "for the conversation and the ground, if you gather not only grapes and olives in it but also pluck the fruit of pure divine wisdom. In fact, perhaps I do an injustice to your wisdom even calling you a vinedresser" (Μακάριε τῆς ξυνουσίας καὶ τοῦ ἀγροῦ, εἰ μὴ μόνον ἐλάας καὶ βότρυς ἐν αὐτῷ τρυγᾶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ σοφίαν δρέπη θεῖαν τε καὶ ἀκήρατον. καὶ ἴσως ἀδικῶ τὴν ἐν σοὶ σοφίαν, καλῶν γε ἀμπελουργόν.: *Her.* 4.11).¹⁷ The vinedresser insists that it is in this working role that he should be praised, as this enables his connection with the hero. "You would gratify Protesilaos in naming me a farmer, gardener, and the like," he reassures the visitor (4.12). Indeed, he proclaims that Protesilaos and he work together (4.7–10).

¹⁷ The text used here is the Teubner of De Lannoy (1977); translations are mine.

As the two living men chat they come to the spot where these mystic dialogues with the hero occur. Without being directed, the Phoenician guesses that this is the place for the talks, for, to him, it seems “most sweet and numinous” (*hêdiston...kai theion*: 5.2). Thus far we remain close to the rhetoric of the appropriate narrative space, as seen in Achilles Tatius 1.2.3. In this spot, notices the visitor, grow age-old lofty trees, and there is excellent running spring water. Moreover, as he observes, his host has woven trees together to produce a sort of enclosure—explicitly compared to a theatrical skênê—so tightly woven that it surpasses a crown from an uncut meadow (*ek leimônos akêratou*: 5.3).¹⁸ From the details, it is clear that Philostratus and Achilles Tatius are working with the same conventions: gardener as artist and as narrator. But in Philostratus, the gardener is further one who brings back to life nothing less than the Hellenic past itself—not just withering, love sick plants. The metaphor is not pushed too hard. The Phoenician says “whether anyone might come to life again (*anabiôiê*) in this spot, I do not know. But one might live (*biôiê*) very pleasantly, without a doubt, and very painlessly, having moved away from the throng” (5.2). The *locus amoenus*, in this view, turns out to be a spot so powerful that it produces not the effects of love, as in the romantic novel, but of new life. This renewed life has to be mediated by the gardener. And of course the crucial fact is that this gardener works the soil near a hero-shrine.

At this point one might object that we have a unique case. What can such a marginal, not to say downright weird, story have to tell us about narrative spaces, or spaces for narrating, in what look to be more mainstream fictions? Is not the *Heroikos* simply an ultra-precious, supremely archaistic piece of work by a slick and sophisticated member of an advanced intellectual dynasty? Well, yes. But that is its virtue. In seeking his own connection to the roots of Greek tradition, this scion of the Philostrati has struck deep into a millennium-old cultural formation, the institution of hero-cult.¹⁹ The cultural root-system of hero worship bring with it number of tenacious tendrils that give Greek literature of all periods a very different and distinctive soil in which to grow. First, if one believes—as Greeks seem to have done—that certain spots (more than 900 of which we hear tell of) retain the bones of heroes, the landscape becomes a living palimpsest. Or, in other words,

¹⁸ The diction recalls Eur. *Hipp.* 73–78 and Ibycus *PMG* 286.

¹⁹ On the mythopoetics of this institution, the most important work is Nagy (1999); on the archaeology and its implications, see Antonaccio (1995).

ground is story. Every rock and tree and hill has the inherent potential to tell a tale, needing only a devoted local exegete to activate the epic heroic narrative. This is to say that the intellectual and cultural framework is in place for treating certain localities as both good to talk about and good to talk in. And so one might seriously compare the situation of the Greek novelist, even in late antiquity, to that of tale-tellers among Australian aboriginals. As many ethnographers have shown, the entire landscape of inner Australia is organized and understood by its inhabitants in terms of the stories from the Dreamtime associated with every natural feature.²⁰ The ancient heroes made the landscape and still dwell within it, in Greece as well as in Australia—and as not in London, Berlin, New York or other centers of production for the modern novel.

A further refinement on this theme of rooted connection to the ground of history occurs in Philostratus. We learn from the vinedresser that on the spot where Protesilaos is buried (a *kolônos*) there grow trees that the Nymphs themselves planted to commemorate the dead hero. These elms have a unique feature: all the leaves on them that face in the direction of Troy bloom early and die young, in imitation of the pathos of Protesilaos. To explain the cycle of foliage, the vine-dresser must know the distant origin of the trees and their roots in the heroic past. In sum, the gardener and his landscape form a continuity with the primeval planters and plantings—another reason why this figure makes a good tale-teller.

A coda: although Hollywood has inherited the ancient novelistic convention that beautiful stories happen in beautiful places, it is with the added twist that they happen exclusively to beautiful people. This tradition has its grounding in the idea that certain places are heroically numinous and therefore beautiful; of course, the modern version assumes, instead, that places are beautiful because they cost a lot. In the harsh glare of Los Angeles, such a dominant tradition—that beautiful places are made for beautiful talk—turns out to make a contrast we might not have realized before when we turn to the limpid light of ancient Attica and a famous passage from Plato. This text (*Phaedrus* 229b–230d) has inevitably been cited as the parallel for the topos that we have been tracing in later Greek prose works. Commentaries note it, but abandon it at the level of parallel. It is true that Socrates at 230b

²⁰ On the Dreamtime and Aboriginal myth organization, see Luomala (1984) and Roberts (1973).

praises the *locus amoenus* to which Phaedrus has led him for their dialogue in terms very much like those we have seen in Achilles Tatius:

Νῆ τὴν Ἑραν, καλὴ γε ἡ καταγωγὴ. ἢ τε γὰρ πλάτανος αὕτη μάλ' ἀμφιλαφὴς τε καὶ ὑψηλή, τοῦ τε ἄγνου τὸ ὕψος καὶ τὸ σύσκιον πάγκαλον, καὶ ὡς ἀκμὴν ἔχει τῆς ἄνθης, ὡς ἂν εὐωδέστατον παρέχοι τὸν τόπον· ἢ τε αὖ πηγὴ χαριεστάτη ὑπὸ τῆς πλατάνου ῥεῖ μάλα ψυχροῦ ὕδατος, ὥστε γε τῷ ποδὶ τεκμήρασθαι. Νυμφῶν τέ τινων καὶ Ἀχελώου ἱερὸν ἀπὸ τῶν κορῶν τε καὶ ἀγαλμάτων ἔοικεν εἶναι.

“By Hera, the resting place is indeed fine. This plane-tree is wide-spreading and tall, and the height and shade of the chaste-tree is very fine, and as it is at the height of its bloom it can provide the most fragrant spot. The most gratifying spring flows out from under the plane-tree, with water that is very cold (at least as the foot tests it). It seems, from the statues and votive offerings, to be a shrine of some Nymphs and of Acheloos.”

The place is touched with the erotic and religious simultaneously, having a shrine of the nymphs and the loving river Acheloos. There is, moreover, a chorus—not of maidens, but of cicadas (230c1)—and soft grass to lie upon. All in all, a perfect spot. Lulled by the later illustrations of this locus, we might not remember the irony with which the locale is framed, however. At first the *Phaedrus* seems to support the claim that I have been forwarding: that beautiful places are good for talk because divine events are traditionally localized within such places (as is made explicit in the *Heroikos*). What divine event happened here, then, at the topos to which the interlocutors have come? It is the spot from which Boreas, wind and hero, snatched his beloved Oreithuia once upon a time as she played with her maidens. At least, that is what Phaedrus believes (229b4–5), and we would like to believe with him. After all, that is what beautiful places are for; they should resonate still from the touch of the holiness they once felt. The waters here are pure, clean, transparent, and it seems a spot where girls might play (229b7–9). But Socrates casually shoots us down. “No, it is two or three stades lower downstream—there’s an altar somewhere there to Boreas” (229c1–3). If there is a polar opposite to the novel, philosophy is it. If there is an antipodes to the gardener, it is Socrates. Even his praise of the *locus amoenus* is deeply un-

dercut in the *Phaedrus* by the fact that, by his own admission, he never gets out of the city. Any old tree would be as beautiful or indifferent to him, as unnecessary a feature as are the beautiful stories set in their exquisite places. But then again, Socrates never did know what was proper to talk about, or how to use beautiful phrases, or even when to shut his mouth.

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